

**Illuminating expertise in academic language development:
English for Academic Purposes practitioners in the UK**

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Illuminating expertise in academic language development: English for Academic Purposes practitioners in the UK

This qualitative case study focuses on English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioner accounts of student academic language development at a UK university. EAP practitioners are often uniquely well-placed as experts in the complexities of language development and academic language choices which vary according to discipline, epistemological stance, and genre. However, their expertise is often misunderstood or misrepresented. This study contributes to debates on academic language development by using a variation on nominal focus group technique to capture the expertise of EAP practitioners and by applying a lens of language as a social semiotic. Thematic analysis establishes four EAP practitioner discourses: the WHAT and the HOW of language development, and CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS and DECISION-MAKING in language development. The significance of this study lies in the illumination of experienced EAP practitioners' expertise through a framework that can inform conversations about language development policies at institutional level.

Keywords

English for Academic Purposes practitioners, expertise, higher education policy, language development

Introduction

In 1997, Kaplan and Baldauf demanded that higher education institutions (HEIs) ‘re-examine their language related strategies to see if they are meeting current demands’ (p. 257). Many HEIs have ignored this call for a strategic approach to language development because language is often viewed as autonomous from meaning and knowledge (Bond, 2020). This conduit model has powerful roots in empiricist and rationalist traditions and one consequence of this view is that language development is seen as ‘remedial’ (Lillis and Turner, 2001). However, Kaplan and Baldauf’s demand remains valid today in universities with diverse, multilingual, bidialectal (Preece, 2009) and ‘traditional’ student populations who bring with them varied linguistic and educational experiences and who may feel disadvantaged if lecturers assume ‘that students already know or should know the rules around academic culture and discourse’ (MacKay and Devlin, 2014).

In some countries (eg. Australia) government-level debates about language (Moore and Harrington, 2016) have led to institution-level language and literacy development policies (eg. Murray and Hicks, 2016). However, in the UK university-wide approaches are rare and provision can be dispersed and difficult to locate (Wingate, 2015). One reason is the lack of clarity about who is responsible for leading language and literacy development (Nicholls, 2020). Leadership is key among several

factors for successful institution-wide approaches (Dunworth et al, 2014): ‘a viable strategy requires the involvement of both disciplinary and language experts, as well as competent leadership.’ (p. 259) Disciplinary experts clearly know their disciplinary discourses, however, their knowledge can be tacit (Elton, 2010) and difficult for them to articulate (McGrath et al, 2019). While examples abound of micro-level collaborations embedding language expertise into curricula (Li, 2020), one barrier to institution-level policy and planning is that ‘communication between people with power and people with expertise could be improved’ (Fenton-Smith and Gurney, 2016, p.84). Research is needed that enables communication between these groups.

One group of experts in academic language and literacies is English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners. Their goal is to enable students and staff to perform academic tasks optimally through the medium of English (Hyland and Shaw, 2016). Their expertise comprises knowledge of academic discourses, encompassing research and pedagogic genres including 'student genres' (Nesi and Gardner, 2012), pedagogic approaches, and sensitivity towards their institutional context (Sloan and Porter, 2010).

EAP practitioners frequently collaborate with academics across their institutions (eg. Dudley-Evans and St John, 1998; Benesch, 2001; Wingate, 2015), yet there remains a misconception that EAP practitioners' expertise is limited to correcting grammatical constructions: 'You do 'SPAG' [spelling and grammar], don't you?' (personal communication, professional and academic support services leader 2019). This misrepresentation is compounded by the absence of research capturing the practices and expertise of experienced EAP practitioners (Campion, 2016; Ding and Bruce, 2017), despite over 40 years of EAP research (Hyland and Jiang, 2021) and 50 years of practice (Bruce, 2021). Whilst some research attempts to specify how EAP

practice differs from general English language teaching (eg. Martin, 2014), the main differences appear to be the identification of a specific target language content, academic discourse (eg. Martin, 2014; Champion, 2016) and practitioners' relationship with academia (Bruce, 2021; Ding and Bruce, 2017). Lee's (2016) genre analysis of practitioners' moves in EAP classrooms identifies three distinct phases – opening, activity cycle, closing – but his focus is on the associated linguistic features associated with these phases, rather than their rationale of their work. The BALEAP (2008) Competency Framework for Teachers of English for Academic Purposes provides an invaluable source of information about what EAP expertise could look like, but it is primarily written for an EAP audience. Without a clearly articulated understanding of what EAP practitioners do and why we do it, that is accessible to a wider audience, reductive misrepresentations may continue and our expertise is unlikely to be fully utilised by institutions (Atai and Taherkani, 2018). This article begins to fill this gap by exploring EAP expertise. I define EAP expertise as a process (Bereiter and Scardamalia as cited in Tsui, 2003) iteratively building on cognitions, 'what teachers know, believe and think' (Borg, 2003, p. 81), about EAP and pedagogy, in 'dialectical relation with context' (Tsui, 2003, p. 64) through reflexive practices (Tsui, 2003). This iterative process is represented two-dimensionally in Figure 1.

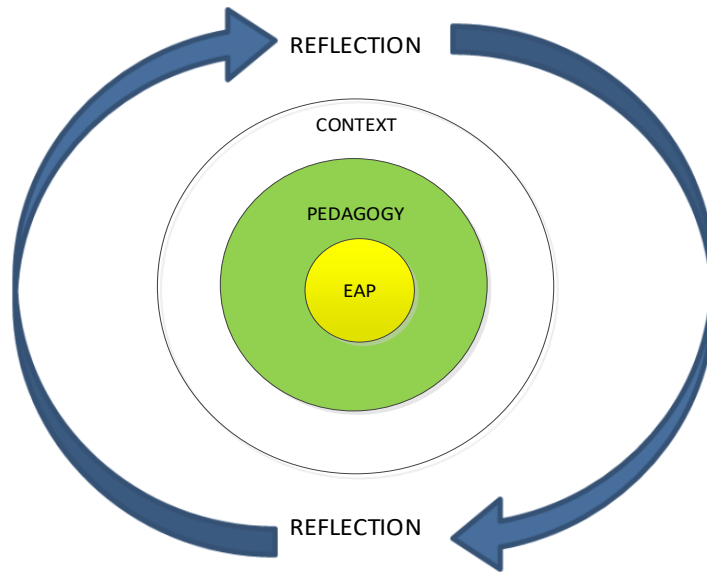


Figure 1 Expertise combining cognitions of EAP, pedagogy, context and reflection

This article illuminates EAP practitioners' discourses of language development, because it is through discourses that ideologies, practices, meanings and values are shared (Fairclough, 1995). This single case study is part of a larger multiple case study (as defined by Stake, 2006) whose goal is to elucidate multiple stakeholders' discourses of language development. The single case study reported here, of EAP practitioners, is important because of their position as 'people with expertise' as contrasted with 'people with power' (Zhao and Baldauf, 2012; Fenton-Smith and Gurney, 2016) (see Nicholls, 2020 for a discussion about academic leaders' discourses around language development). A later study will consolidate different stakeholders' discourses.

The research question is:

How do EAP practitioners account for the development of students' effective language use in academic contexts?

Conceptual framework

I use Coffin and Donohue's (2014) work based on Vygotsky (1986), Bernstein (1996) and Hasan (2005, 2011), to define 'effective language use'. Coffin and Donohue's (2014) language as a social semiotic model describes how 'knowledge, behaviours and language develop symbiotically' (p.4). By locating language development as constitutive in knowledge development, language and literacy development blend with understandings of disciplinary discourses, practices and epistemologies (see Hyland, 2004): language choices are deemed successful when they align with their disciplinary audiences' expectations.

I outline two situations where effective language use is fundamental (i) to learning, and (ii) to producing linguistic text for assessment. Figure 2 replicates Coffin and Donohue's (2014) representation of Hasan's (2005) explanation of semiotic mediation processes in these situations, whilst acknowledging that lecturers form just one source of learning, and students also interact with a wide range of learning materials.

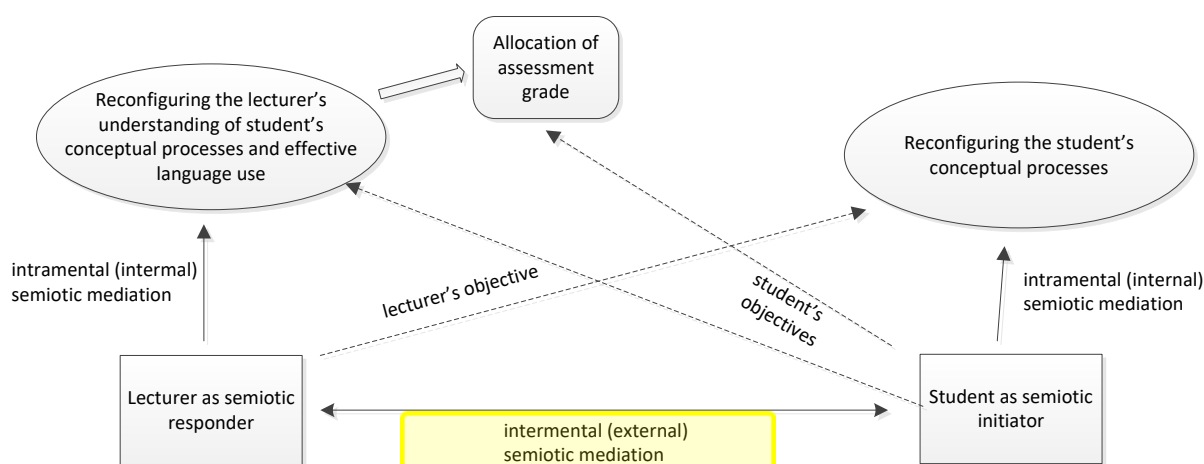


Figure 2. Semiotic mediation in an assessment (adapted from Coffin and Donohue 2014, 28) (Highlighted section represents the linguistic content that constitutes the focus of EAP provision)

Figure 2 shows that the lecturer's objective is to change the student's understanding of a specific concept. This requires both successful communication between the lecturer and the student, 'intermental semiotic mediation', and successful 'intramental semiotic mediation' as the student makes sense of the information received. This communication is often multi-modal, but here I focus on language use. Effective language use leads to student learning: students' conceptual processes are reconfigured.

Meanwhile the student's objective is to reconfigure the lecturer's understanding of what the student knows. The student produces a monologic text to demonstrate their learning. The lecturer develops an understanding of what the student has understood and allocates a grade. Importantly for the student and EAP practitioner, I have added the fact that the lecturer's understanding of the student's powers of semiotic mediation also influences the assessment grade (see Nicholls, 2020). Language or communication are frequently included in university assessment criteria but are rarely explicitly included in the curriculum (Wingate, 2015). A lack of disciplinary discourse teaching contributes to a 'pedagogy of osmosis' (Turner, 2011, p. 21) in which newcomers to academic discourses are expected to acquire new rules of semiotic mediation without explanation. Turner claims the 'assumption of osmosis is predicated on sameness. The same kinds of people enter the academic as have always entered' (Turner, 2011, p. 21). That assumption clearly cannot hold in today's HEIs as student demographics increasingly diversify due to widening participation and internationalisation (Wingate, 2015).

This analysis provides essential background to the EAP practitioner's expertise for two reasons. Firstly, it foregrounds the fundamental role of language in learning and assessment in academic contexts (Coffin and Donohue, 2014) thus highlighting the

'value of *metasemiotic awareness*' (Coffin and Donohue, 2014, p. 30, italics in original).

Secondly, it informs EAP practitioners which language features to teach: those which facilitate intermental semiotic mediation for learning and assessment.

Methodology

This single case study of a group of EAP practitioners in an applied UK university takes an inductive, qualitative approach. It is part of a larger multiple case study in which each case focusses on one stakeholder group. To answer my open-ended research question, I designed a variation on the 'Nominal Focus Group Technique' (Varga Atkins et al., 2017) which combines in-depth discussion and prioritisation. This enabled me to prompt focussed discussion without entering those interactions, which is important because of my multiple roles of co-teacher, manager and researcher.

I held three focus groups each lasting approximately 1 hour 30 minutes, with 3-4 participants in each. In total there were ten participants (EAPL1 - EAPL10): six women and four men. Each participant had at least an initial teaching certificate and a masters in an EAP-related subject, two had PhDs in linguistics and actively published. All had between 5 and 25 years' experience teaching EAP and the mean was over 13 years': collectively they provide insights into the practices of experienced EAP practitioners.

To facilitate ease within the focus groups, EAP practitioners with similar roles were grouped together (Stewart et al., 2007). Practitioners were grouped thus: members of a project to embed disciplinary specific academic language and literacy development regardless of linguistic background; course leaders of pre-sessional, in-sessional and international foundation programmes; and EAP practitioners teaching bi/multilingual students. Although this provided some homogeneity of experience, these distinctions are not categorical: some practitioners in the first group were also course leaders, and all participants were active in EAP teaching.

To instigate focus group discussion without becoming engaged in the conversation, I structured the focus groups with a written pre-task and two tasks in the focus group (see Table 1). The pre-task was to describe a successful activity that developed students' academic language including: the teaching context; their teaching objectives; why participants considered the activity successful. Whilst acknowledging that self-reports of teaching and actual practices may differ (Borg, 2006), I suggest that accounts and discussions of 'successful' activities provide valid insights into EAP practitioners' discourses, and therefore their practices and ideologies (Fairclough, 1995). The descriptions provided both data and material for the focus group discussion. I thematically analysed the descriptions before the focus groups (Table 2).

Phase	Who	Task and content
1 - pre-task	individual participants	describe an activity that has been successful; provide biodata
2 – activity analysis	researcher	inductive thematic analysis of activity descriptions – create codes
3 – description and discussion of activities	focus groups	describe own activity to group and ask for clarifications when listening
4 – hierarchy creation	individual participants during the focus group period	create hierarchy of codes that are important in enabling language development
5 – explanation and discussion of hierarchy	focus groups	explain reasoning behind the hierarchy created – ask for clarifications
6 – data analysis	researcher	inductive thematic analysis of focus group transcripts

Table 1 Data collection and analysis phases

During each focus group, participants described their activities and asked each other for any clarifications, generating considerable discussion. I then gave participants themes I had generated from thematic analysis of their written pre-tasks (Table 2). The thematic analysis was guided by constant reference to the research question and built on the coding of an earlier case in the larger multiple case study (Nicholls, 2020). Each participant had a set of themes on sticky notes. Participants were asked to create a hierarchy of themes in answer to the question, 'Which of these characteristics/ considerations/ issues would you consider most important in enabling language development?' Participants were invited to use the themes provided, add missing themes, and discard any they felt were irrelevant.

Focus group 1	Focus group 2	Focus group 3
content of communication	accuracy	abstraction
difficulty	appropriate source use	confidence
discussion	audience of communication	discipline and course specificity
feedback	collaboration	discussion
flow	confidence	enjoyment
language and literacy gap	content of communication	integrated language provision
language as developmental skill	discipline/ course specificity	language choices
language as specific to goals and contexts	L1 L2 learner differences	noticing
language choices	L1 L2 similarities	practice
metalanguage	language as developmental skill	reflection
practice	language choices	technical view of language
purpose of communication	metalanguage	threshold
questioning lecturers' expectations	mode of communication	visual learning
reading	moves	<i>Added by participants:</i>
reflection	noticing	<i>interest/motivation</i>
relevance	discussion	
rhetorical view of language	practice	
scaffolding	purpose of communication	
strategies	reading	
text structure	reflection	
time in learning	relevance	

using models	rhetorical view of language
visual learning	scaffolding
<i>Added by participants:</i>	sense of achievement
<i>challenge</i>	space
<i>joy of writing</i>	strategies
	structure
	student engagement
	student motivation
	technical view of language
	transfer
	use of IT
	use of models
	visual learning

Table 2 Lists of themes/codes provided to focus group participants to place into a hierarchy

Participants created their own hierarchies, which they explained to the group (Figure 3). The prioritisation task derives from the Nominal Focus Group Technique (Varga-Atkins et al., 2017). However, unlike Varga-Atkins et al.'s process, there was no compulsion to reach agreement. The task instead was for individuals to explain their hierarchy to prompt further discussion. This combination of tasks structured the focus groups enabling me to gain data, whilst limiting my own interaction.

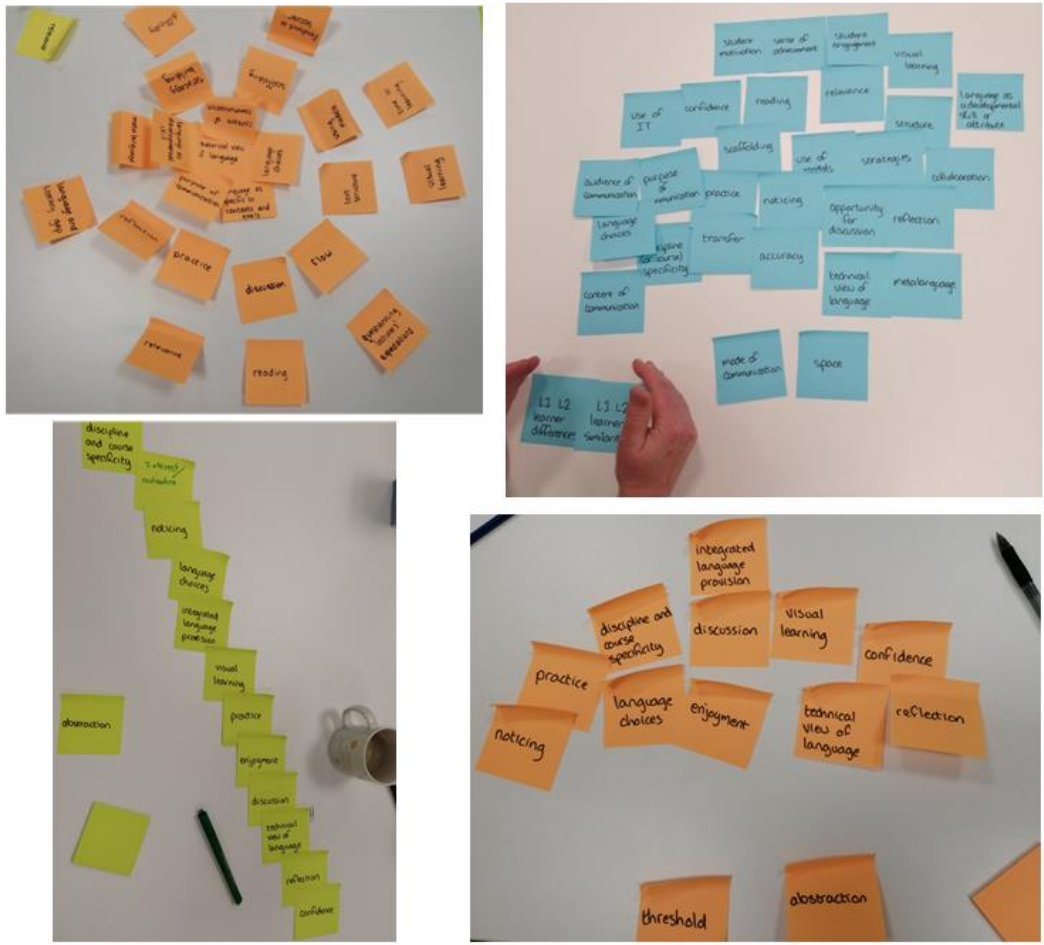


Figure 3 Sample hierarchies (clockwise from top left: EAPL1, EAPL6, EAPL8, EALP9)

The written pre-task and focus group transcripts provide the data for analysis. I thematically analysed both with constant reference to the research question focussing on EAP practitioners' accounts of language development. I built on the inductive thematic coding developed in the first case of the multiple case study (Nicholls, 2020). Unsurprisingly, I developed new codes that relate specifically to the practices and discourses of the EAP practitioner participants. Constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) ensured that all codes developed iteratively: some were combined, others abandoned. Two colleagues peer reviewed this process.

One methodological limitation was the restriction of EAP practitioners' accounts of language development to the teaching environment. Little was said about either what happens outside of the EAP classroom that enables learners' academic language development or EAP practitioners' own scholarship and research findings. Further, by restricting the analysis of the data to the two scenarios of a pedagogic intervention and assessment, I risked oversimplifying the students' linguistic needs and ignoring social and other motivations for communication in HE. For the purposes of this case study, however, my method generated rich data providing useful insights into EAP practitioners' accounts of language development.

Findings and discussion

Participants described wide-ranging activities (Table 3) encompassing a diverse range of students, objectives and EAP teaching contexts, including single discipline and mixed discipline pre-sessional classes, discipline related foundation course modules, and academic language and literacy provision embedded in disciplinary modules.

Participant and focus group		Teaching focus	Cycle of activities (see key below)
EAPL1	focus group 1	reading strategies	R - N (using a tick list) - D - P (reading)
EAPL2		semantic waves in reflective writing	AR - N (text analysis) - D - AR - N - P (writing) - D
EAPL3		language varieties/ register	AR - P/N (role play with observers) - D
EAPL4	focus group 2	reporting what you've read	E - AR - N (sentence structures with reporting verbs) - D - P (writing)
EAPL5		vocabulary learning awareness raising	R - D - AR - D - AR - N (learner dictionary content) - P (produce poster) - D
EAPL6		paraphrasing	AR/E - N (sample sentences) - P (sentence paraphrases) - D
EAPL7		language and structure of posters	E - N (structural analysis) - D - N (language analysis) - D - P (edit own posters)
EAPL8	focus group 3	the concept of and examples of metaphor	AR - E - N (video about artwork) - D - N (paper based art) - D - P (draw their own metaphor in art)
EAPL9		style in academic writing	E - D - AR - R - N (text analysis) - P (improve sample text) - D - P (improve own writing) - D - R

EAP10		lexical approach to vocabulary learning	AR - N (lexical form and usage) - P (using lexical item in own work)
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Table 3 Focus group participants' teaching focus and activities (key: AR = awareness raising, D = dialogue, E = eliciting, N = noticing, P = practicing, R = reflecting)

In relation to the research question, *How do EAP practitioners account for the development of students' effective language use in academic contexts*, I grouped themes using an adaptation of Coffin and Donohue's (2014) teaching scenario (Figure 2), repurposed to represent an EAP teaching and learning event. In the adapted representation (Figure 4), an EAP practitioner has the objective of reconfiguring students' linguistic knowledge and communicative competence (their capacity for intermental semiotic mediation in Figure 2) and students respond through their intramental semiotic mediation: their EAP knowledge and communicative competence develops.

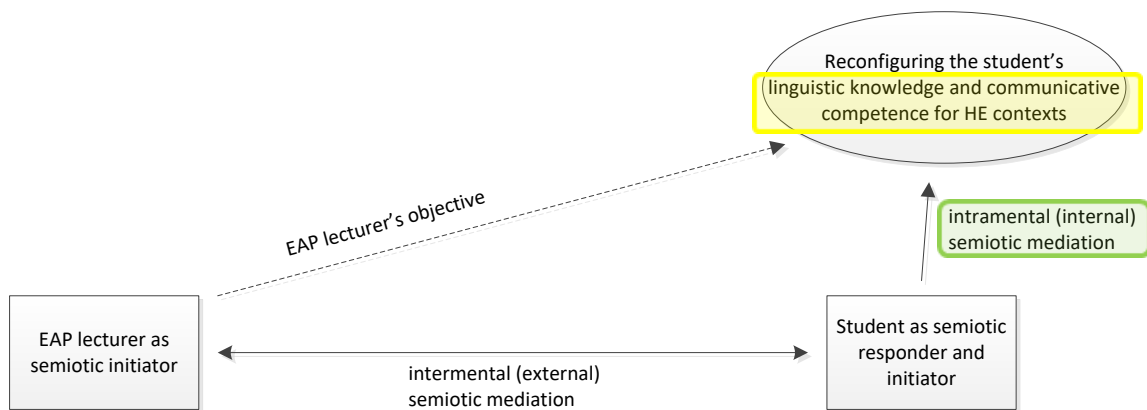


Figure 4. Semiotic mediation processes in an EAP teaching and learning scenario (Highlighted sections relate to the WHAT (yellow) and HOW (green) of language development in Figure 7)

The EAP practitioner's objective is to enable students to use language effectively during those processes of semiotic mediation described in Figure 2. The intermental semiotic mediation in yellow in Figure 2 becomes the content for reconfiguration in Figure 4. My analysis illuminates how EAP practitioners' understand the process of development (green in Figure 4) of that language (yellow in Figure 4).

Analysing the data through this lens, I grouped themes under four discourses: the WHAT of language development; the HOW of language development; CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS of language development; and DECISION-MAKING in language development (Figure 5). These are elaborated below.

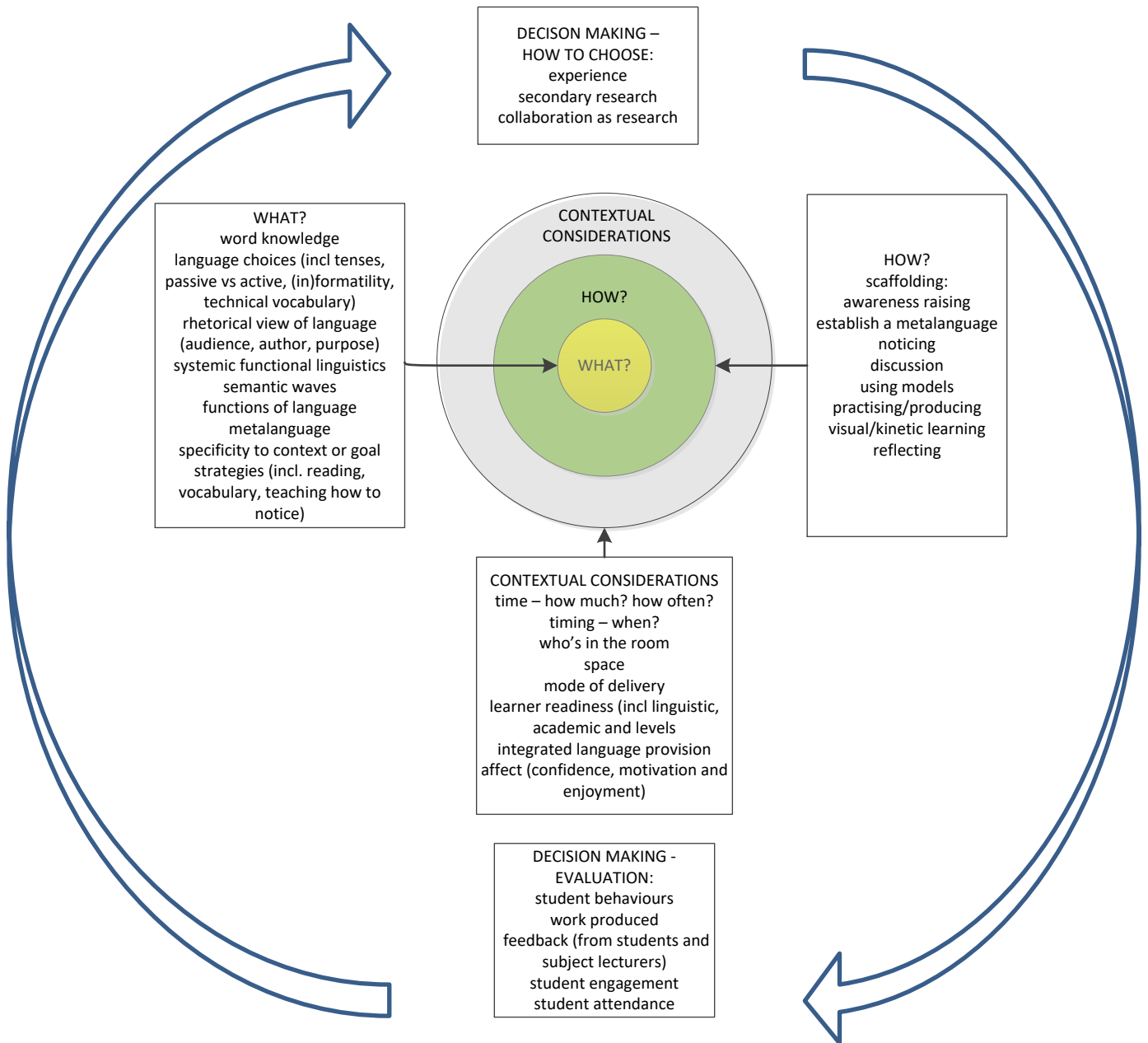


Figure 5. Codes collated under themes: the WHAT of language development; the HOW of language development; CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS for language development; DECISION MAKING in language development

The WHAT of language development

The first theme is the WHAT of language development: the WHAT of EAP. This includes lexico-grammatical knowledge summarised in the codes ‘word knowledge’ and ‘language choices’. Word knowledge can be summarised as ‘what it means to know a word’ (EAPL5), including ‘learning different aspects of a word and how it could be used in different contexts’ (EAPL5). Similarly ‘language choices’ refers to a wide range of grammatical choices: for example ‘compressed language’ (EAPL7) for poster titles; verb mood and tense, ‘there’s a lot ... that’s written in the passive in these [model posters], otherwise it’s usually simple present or simple past’ (EAPL7); pronoun use in relation to genre and epistemological stance, ‘What do you think about your [reflective] portfolios, would you use ‘I’ or ‘we’?’ (EAPL9); sentence structure in citation patterns, ‘it was about non-integral and integral citations as well’ (EAPL4); and nominalisation and abstraction in academic writing, ‘how this word in the concrete changes into ... a noun phrase and a chunk and a more theoretical ... thing.’ (EAPL2) Importantly, throughout this data, linguistic features, are always contextualised and practiced in relation to the academic context in which they are used.

Beyond this lexico-grammatical knowledge, the EAP practitioners refer to a range of theoretical linguistic approaches. One approach is evidenced by the code ‘rhetorical view of language’ and highlights the consideration of audience, author and purpose. For example, returning to the teaching of art and design posters, EAPL7 identified how in the session she highlighted the idea that, ‘Your purpose is to draw someone in and make them want to read it.’ Meanwhile, in a session on source use, EAPL4 prompted students to consider their audience by asking, ‘Do you think that this is something your tutor would expect you to know?’ leading to a discussion about what

constitutes common knowledge in students' disciplines. The inclusion of this code does not indicate universal agreement about the usefulness of a rhetorical view of language amongst these EAP practitioners. One EAP practitioner who avoids speaking explicitly about 'author, purpose and audience' finds it, 'all too nebulous' (EAPL3) and finds the 'direct line between field, mode and tenor and the language structures' far more potent, although he explicitly acknowledged that he would not use those terms with his EAP students. This EAP practitioner's preference for Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics demonstrates the wide-ranging approaches to linguistic analysis used by EAP practitioners.

Other concepts of language use and knowledge are evidenced by EAPL2 in her use of semantic waves from Legitimation Code Theory (Kirk, 2017; Maton, 2020). EAPL2 describes how, 'you talk about this idea of what's concrete and what's abstract for their field ... and then you look at how the texts move, whether it starts down at the concrete and then goes up to abstract or whether it sort of goes like that [waves downwards with hand]'.

This latter example also demonstrates how EAP practitioners introduce metalanguage, 'language about language' (EAPL3), through exemplification. Despite some reticence of using technical terms when teaching language to people whose primary goal is to learn their discipline(s), not language (eg. EAPL3), EAPL2 highlights one advantage of introducing students to metalanguage, 'because they can talk to the [subject] lecturer about what they have done using the language that they've learned from the session.' Furthermore, one participant suggested that part of EAP practitioners' role is to enhance academic teaching and learning practices through the introduction of a shared metalanguage, 'I think it's actually really important that we develop a language for talking about this stuff.' (EAPL1)

A further view of language is highlighted by EAPL7 in her discussion about the functional content of the art and design posters, ‘There’s an awful lot of process description which is EAP but you might not think of it for art and design’. At one level, this familiar phrase ‘process description’, helps EAP practitioner to identify relevant linguistic forms, text structures, and linking words to teach. Once again, though, it is worth noting the contextualisation, ‘you might not think of it for art and design.’

The constant reference to contextual specificity (of discipline, genre and/or pedagogy) is fundamental to the EAP practitioners’ discourse in this study. It is embodied in practice in several ways: through students’ choices of texts, ‘we refer the contents ... to something they’ve brought about their discipline’ (EAPL5 – vocabulary learning); through models chosen by EAP practitioners (EAPL4); and in the pedagogic choices of activity design, ‘I don’t think it [the visual metaphor activity] would have worked with, you know, the engineers ...’ (EAPL8). In contrast, the risks of talking about a “general” academic English style were also clear, ‘You don’t want to over-generalise too much’ (EAPL10). The importance of this specificity or contextualisation lies in the accessibility and relevance that EAP practitioners constantly have in mind: ‘it’s about actually students taking on what we say or what they do in that session and seeing the value and the relevance and feeling a little bit in control of what they’re doing’ (EAPL2). In short, it is about enabling empowerment.

The WHAT of EAP teaching also includes metacognitive approaches, which are exemplified under the theme ‘strategies’ including vocabulary learning strategies (EAPL5, EAPL10) and reading strategies (EAPL1). EAP practitioners consider both linguistics and learning processes.

Overlapping the WHAT in Figure 5 with the social semiotic processes in Figures 2 and 4, it becomes clear that the expertise of the EAP practitioners provides

analysis of the ‘intermental semiotic mediation’ that occurs between lecturer and student. The data demonstrate how these EAP practitioners utilise numerous pedagogical and analytical linguistic approaches to identify what effective language use is and provide and exemplify metalanguage that can be used to discuss it. Experienced EAP practitioners scaffold and provide metalanguage for the discussions needed between students and subject lecturers (Lillis and Turner, 2001; Elton, 2010; Clarence, 2012). EAP practitioners have the expertise to support what Coffin and Donohue (2014) refer to as ‘metasemiotic awareness’ (p. 6), empowering students whose language is developing in higher education, and for whom the ‘pedagogy of osmosis’ (Turner, 2011, p. 21) is at best inefficient and at worst iniquitous. Quite clearly, the WHAT of language development is a lot more than SPAG. Importantly, yet unfortunately, this knowledge can be tacit to EAP practitioners themselves (Bruce and Ding, 2017), which limits discussions with policy makers and other stakeholders.

The HOW of language development

Participants described cycles of activities they deemed successful (Table 3). The cycles were understood as scaffolding the learning of effective language use (EAPL6). Indeed ‘scaffolding’ was often at or near the top of the EAP practitioners’ hierarchies (EAPL2, EAPL3, EAPL4, EAPL5 EAPL6, and EAPL7): ‘However we interpret the language or the assessment task or whatever it is that we think students need to understand, it all comes down to, “How do we get them to understand it?” and, for me, that is all about the scaffolding.’ (EAPL3).

Early parts of the scaffolding process include awareness-raising (EAPL5) and establishing a metalanguage (EAPL1). Establishing a metalanguage has specifically

transactional purposes: 'It's a linguistic concept that's scaffolded so that everybody can use it [the concept]' (EAPL3).

After awareness-raising, noticing is a key stage in the scaffolding process. EAPL9 describes how following an elicitation activity to highlight formality in writing, students were given a noticing activity: 'they had a prompt, like for example an essay or an email ... and then ... they compared in pairs' (EAPL9). Here the noticing activity started as an individual task, and then was complemented by the opportunity for dialogue, another regular practice which was reported at different stages of the scaffolding process.

Another practice was the use of models. Models were referred to in awareness-raising and noticing activities and as part of the creation of disciplinary discourse knowledge. Models analysed by EAP practitioners illuminate aspects of disciplinary discourses for students that may be tacit for subject lecturers who '... don't really know what they're expecting ... that's why I think it's better ... when we analyse successful pieces of work' (EAPL1). Fundamental, therefore, to the work described by this group of the EAP practitioners is subject lecturers' collaboration: 'They need to provide really good models, don't they...' (EAPL4).

In contrast to the common (Martin, 2014) but contested (see Anderson, 2017) English language teaching model of Presentation Practice and Production (PPP), which highlights practice and production as separate phases of language learning, these EAP practitioners often used the concepts interchangeably as enabling students to transfer language or strategies beyond the classroom: 'so after you've been scaffolded, you've seen your models, you need to practice, then you can transfer [what you've learnt]' (EAPL6). In some scenarios, like vocabulary learning, this required activities generating 'pushed output' (EAPL6, EAPL5). In other scenarios practice/production directly

related to the target product (EAPL1, EAPL7, EAPL9). Regardless of the authenticity of practice/production, this step is crucial to the learning process (EAPL7).

A further phase of the scaffolding process was reflection. This is highlighted most clearly by EAPL9 who after asking students to apply what they had learnt about academic style to their own writing noted, ‘when I asked them to reflect ... they were able to come up with their own like list of the features ... that linked to their main weaknesses that they identified in ... their own writing.’ (EAPL9)

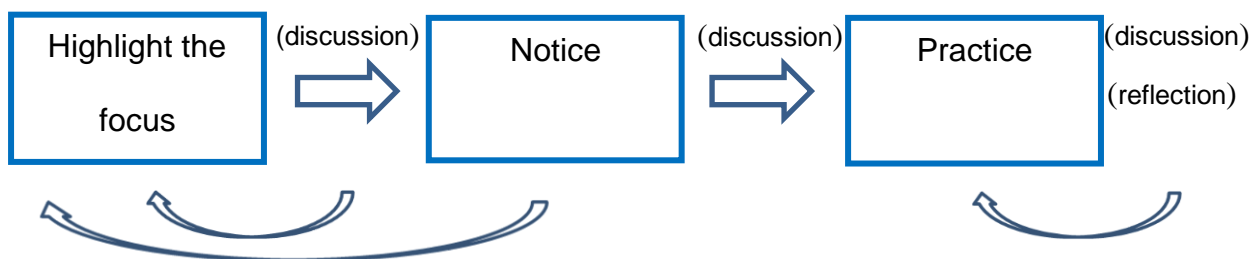


Figure 6. Pattern of activities described

Analysis of the data (Table 3) reveals a three-stage pattern of activities – Highlight-Notice-Practice – supported by discussion and reflection (Figure 6). On the one hand, the similarity in the general cycle is not surprising, given that most practitioners had similar language teacher education. On the other hand, the diverse range of noticing and practicing activities is striking. Noticing activities included checklists (EAPL1), various forms of text analysis (EAPL2, EAPL4, EAPL9, EAPL10), and role play (EAPL3). Practising activities included reading (EAPL1), writing (EAPL2, EAPL4, EAPL6, EAPL5), drawing (EAPL8) and editing (EAPL7, EAPL9) (see Table 3). The wide-ranging activities reflect the diverse objectives.

Superimposing the HOW of language development onto the model of semiotic mediation (Figure 4) reveals EAP practitioners’ understanding of students’ intermental

semiotic mediation processes. The cycle, Highlight-Notice-Practice, differs from teaching cycles such as the Presentation-Practice-Produce often used in general English language teaching (Martin, 2014). Highlighting replaces presentation because students have probably already seen the linguistic features under discussion. Noticing activities manifest EAP practitioners' role of demystifying 'student genres' (Nesi and Gardner, 2012). Practice/production, the ultimate goal of each cycle, replicates the 'intermental semiotic processes' required by students in their inter/disciplinary studies.

The Highlight-Notice-Practice pattern also highlights the belief that effective language development requires explicit teaching and is developed through cycles of individual and interactive learning activities. This mirrors the 'recursive cycle of moves' in Lee's 'activity cycle phase' (2016, p. 104).

Models, provided by subject lecturers and analysed by EAP practitioners or in collaborative discussion, form exemplars that can deepen everyone's knowledge of the language features that require mastery and provide a basis for explicit instruction with students (Wette, 2014). EAP practitioners provide and scaffold the metalanguage used to discuss the models' features, enabling the much-needed talk between subject lecturers, language experts and students (Clarence, 2012).

The simplicity of the cycle hides the 'scaffolding' of context-specific tasks that build students' understanding and use of the language in focus: it hides the EAP practitioners' expertise in scaffolding the development of effective language use in the very specific contexts within HE - the intermental mediation between subject lecturer and student.

Challenges in enabling language development were also discussed. I summarise these under the next discourse: contextual considerations.

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS for language development

My third discourse, contextual considerations, combines factors that EAP practitioners navigate when designing and delivering their sessions, ranging from logistics, such as timing, to considerations about student readiness.

'Time' and 'timing' include when and how much time is available. The amount of time is particularly limited for embedded language development sessions within subject modules. For example, when looking at semantic waves within and across a text, 'it's quite difficult, because of time ... you have to just do a paragraph or two paragraphs' (EAPL2). However, full-time language development courses also struggle: 'there never seems to be enough time ... with all the other things you're meant to be doing in a short sort of course of study' (EAPL4). This is compounded because language development is a long-term endeavour, 'you may feel it [progress] is difficult to see ... in the short term that is' (EAPL10). Frequency is also important as delivering one-off guest sessions did not enable a relationship to be built: 'It definitely works best, doesn't it, when you see people a few ... at least two or three times.' (EAPL2) As well as increasing familiarity between teachers and students, more could be achieved, 'So that you can start something and then move on to actually produce something.' (EAPL2). Timing is important because students can relate best when deadlines are imminent, 'I think because they've got something right in front of them that they know they've got to do, it's something that they easily latch onto.' (EAPL2)

Contextual considerations include who is in the room and 'our role in the room' (EAPL1) which varied according to the participants' contexts. For example, when teaching a session as part of a disciplinary module, the very presence of the subject lecturer was perceived to have a direct impact on the level of engagement of the students: 'so we could go in and do this amazing session, but without that discussion

that happens with the content tutor - and this was what happens when they leave - ... the students don't take on our information or ideas' (EAPL2). The presence of the content tutor was both positive in itself and influential in terms of students' willingness to speak. EAPL3 noted about an interactive lecture in a large lecture theatre, 'when I asked them a question they were more willing to kind of join that space because [subject lecturer] had already jumped in!' The combined presence of students, EAP practitioner and subject lecturer was also significant as it enabled discussion about 'what the language is and the students and the lecturer having that same sort of clarity.' (EAPL2)

In the art and design group, who is in the room related to the spatial context. The activity took place in a studio which has its own practices: '1) they're very big rooms, and 2) you are never the only person in that space. So we're constantly wandering around people, people are working on things and it means that we constantly get chip-ins from students and teachers ... which is kind of nice.' (EAPL7)

Mode of delivery also needs consideration, particularly on embedded language delivery to large cohorts. 'I did it like an interactive lecture ... but obviously they weren't having to respond in the same way [as they would in a small group]' (EAPL2). This contextual challenge was confirmed by EAPL1, 'Lectures are a really bad place to teach academic English, aren't they? It's really hard.'

Learner readiness was considered a further important factor. This included linguistic and academic level, as well as motivation or interest. In terms of linguistic and academic readiness, EAPL6 was clear that work on paraphrasing had to be part of a carefully staged pedagogic process, 'I do stress I wouldn't do it for, in the first week of any pre-session course' (EAPL6). In fact, these students were extremely motivated by the perception that this was an important skill that they had to work up to (EAPL6). Regarding academic level, when reviewing her teaching of semantic waves, EAPL2

noted that whereas masters and second year undergraduate students could grasp their usefulness, first year students sometimes find it difficult, ‘possibly because they don’t have the idea of what the abstract stuff is [in their discipline].’ (EAPL2)

There was strong agreement that integrated language provision is useful across a student’s career, ‘until they become more confident.’ (EAPL9) The development of confidence is one of many affective factors mentioned and is viewed as inherently intertwined with language development (eg. EAPL6). Other affective considerations include student motivation (EAPL8, EAPL9) and student and staff enjoyment (EAPL6, EAPL10): ‘if you’re really ... passionate about this, then it kind of expands onto your students, doesn’t it?’ (EAPL8). Alongside the EAP practitioners’ expertise in academic discourses, their passion for linguistic knowledge, the WHAT of EAP, was palpable. There was also passion for the process and the product: ‘I really want to foster that ... being a successful writer is ... empowering, you know!’ (EAPL1)

The finding that EAP practitioners include contextual considerations in their accounts of effective language development evidences EAP practitioners’ pedagogic expertise and their awareness of their institutional context. This echoes Chanock's (2007) description of Academic Language and Learning practitioners in Australia. Physical, temporal, social, linguistic readiness, academic readiness and affective considerations influenced these EAP practitioners’ pedagogic decisions. Understanding and working within these complexities is fundamental to the EAP practitioner and shapes expertise through a ‘dialectical relation between teachers' knowledge and their world of practice’ (Tsui, 2003, p. 66). Linguistic analysis of the content and the epistemological and pedagogical nuances of the intermental semiotic mediation between subject lecturer and student (Figure 2) underpins the development of activities used by EAP practitioners. This expertise is demonstrated by sensitivity to disciplinary practices

(eg. studio work), learning processes, and the social aspects of learning (eg. who is in the room). EAP practitioners analyse the practices of others to inform their own pedagogic choices. Within institutions, the huge variety of disciplines, assignment types, pedagogic and academic practices can be intimidating to novice EAP practitioners who value learning from colleagues (Campion, 2016; Martin, 2014). I suggest that the explicit sharing of contextual considerations of language development should be valued equally with linguistic knowledge in EAP practitioners' development. Methods from this study could be adapted as developmental exercises with this aim.

DECISION-MAKING in language development

The fourth and overarching discourse of decision-making highlights the cyclical process of planning and evaluation undertaken by EAP practitioners and reflects higher education practices of regular evaluation and evidence-based practice. Practitioners referred to both their professional experience and research, when describing how they made their decisions. For example, EAPL1 describes how the content of the reading strategies checklist '... was actually taken from research of what students do when they read', but also that activities were chosen 'because of my previous experiences.' (EAPL1). Experiential professional knowledge was also the basis for EAPL9's decision-making, 'I chose this ... because I've also done it in the past and I believe it usually works'. In their examples, research and professional experience are referred to as distinct reasons. However, collaboration with subject lecturers allows professional expertise and research to coincide, 'it's that whole process of starting with getting lecturers to question themselves about their language expectations ... and then the students being involved ... it's kind of key to us finding out what the language is and the students and the lecturer having that same sort of clarity.' (EAPL2) Here the

collaborative process is a form of research. Indeed, EAPL3 highlights the importance of the collaborative process with subject lecturers whose own knowledge may be more or less tacit: ‘whether you’ve got somebody that is not really well educated in terms of ... the role of language, or at the other extreme you’ve got somebody that absolutely understands how language works in their subject ... it is all part of the process’ (EAPL3). Here the work of the EAP practitioner as expert is explicit.

In the decision-making cycle, evaluation involved varied forms of evidence: observed students’ behaviours (EAPL5, EAPL10); students’ work (EAPL4); feedback from students and subject lecturers (eg. EAPL7); and student engagement, ‘they were all really intrigued’ (EAPL8). In terms of negative evaluations, EAPL3 candidly described falling attendance at his three lectures on a subject module. However, perceptions of success based on attendance were sometimes contradictory. In another discipline, EAPL3 noted that the subject lecturer perceived a direct positive correlation between student attendance at EAP sessions and student performance.

Given the extraordinary range of cognitions, ‘what teachers know, believe and think’ (Borg, 2003, p. 81), about EAP, pedagogy and context, it is unsurprising that EAP practitioners refer to research, experience and collaborative processes when making decisions about their provision’s design and delivery. Indeed, access to collaborators was transformative in many cases. The wide range of evidence referred to in evaluating the success of activities evidences the reflective and reflexive processes undertaken across the teaching cycle. The dialogue amongst participants points to Tsui's (2003) expert's process of ‘theorising practical knowledge and practicalising theoretical knowledge’ (p. 257). To gain and maintain vital access to collaborating colleagues, these decision-making processes need to be explicitly shared through the same institutional systems and structures that support and ensure quality in all higher

education teaching and learning. They are no less complex; they demand considerable expertise.

Conclusion

This study illuminates the often neglected (Ding and Bruce, 2017) experience and expertise of EAP practitioners. Applying the lens of language as a social semiotic (Coffin and Donohue, 2014), I identify four discourses of language development used by EAP practitioners: the WHAT and the HOW of language development, and CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS and DECISION-MAKING in language development. This group of experienced EAP practitioners consider a wide range of linguistic, pedagogic and contextual factors, and their expertise emanates from research, practice and continuous evaluation. Linguistic analyses of social semiotic processes make explicit the language required for success and provide a much-needed metalanguage, or ‘talk’ (Clarence, 2012) for subject lecturers and students. The pedagogic cycle of Highlight-Notice-Practice using models enables the demystification of academic discourses. The contextual knowledge of language and learning across a whole institution highlights a key area for EAP practitioners to continuously build and share within their teams. Decision-making processes highlight the primary, collaborative, and secondary research and evaluation that typify the reflexive, iterative nature of EAP expertise.

The conclusions of any case study are limited to its own boundaries and therefore cannot be generalised. However, I hope that this case study, which condenses the expertise of one group of language experts, resonates with other academics internationally and can begin to counter reductive perspectives by illuminating EAP practitioners’ discourses. These discourses can structure wider discussions about language development practice and policies amongst important stakeholders who want

to meet the demands of their students but lack a common language. In addition, the identified discourses and the methodological approach could inform EAP and other practitioners' professional development. Further research would be useful to compare different institutions and contexts. In addition, as mentioned, this case study contributes towards a framework that will include multiple stakeholders' accounts of language development in higher education.

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